



**For Immediate Release:**

June 22, 2009

## **First Human Case of West Nile Virus Confirmed in LA County**

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Health Officer has confirmed the first human case of West Nile Virus in Los Angeles County for the 2009 season. The case is a blood donor from the Antelope Valley who donated blood in early June. The person does not show any symptoms (asymptomatic), and is feeling well. The donated blood was not used. Health officials are determining where the patient may have contracted the virus. This is the first documented human case of West Nile Virus (WNV) in California.

“People should take precautions to avoid mosquitoes, as that is the primary way this disease is transmitted. Mosquitoes obtain the virus by feeding on infected wild birds,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “West Nile Virus can appear anywhere in Los Angeles County or around the state, and we urge residents to get rid of pools of stagnant water around their homes, where mosquitoes breed, and to use a repellent containing DEET, or another approved repellent, when outdoors in mosquito-prone areas, especially around dawn or dusk.”

As of June 19<sup>th</sup> in Los Angeles County, Public Health and the mosquito abatement districts have detected WNV in five dead birds, two mosquito pools, and three sentinel chickens. In past seasons, most of the infected birds and positive mosquitoes have been found in the San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, and East Los Angeles County areas.

### **Exposure to West Nile Virus**

WNV is spread from humans through the bite of an infected mosquito; mosquitoes can become infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. Most mosquitoes do not carry the virus and most people bitten by a mosquito have not been exposed to the virus. The virus is not spread through person-to-person contact, or directly from birds to humans.

In most cases, people who are infected with West Nile Virus never become sick, or have only very mild symptoms that include fever, headache, nausea, body aches, and a mild skin rash. Symptoms of West Nile Virus could appear within three to 12 days after infection. Fortunately, fewer than one in 150 people who are bitten by an infected mosquito become severely ill, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In these rare cases, the virus can cause encephalitis and death. The elderly are most at risk for severe cases of the disease. There is no specific treatment for West Nile Virus. However, individuals with severe symptoms may be hospitalized.

### **Preventive Measures**

People can decrease their risk of infection by following these recommendations:

- Avoid mosquito-infested areas at dawn and dusk.

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- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
- Repellants containing DEET, picaridin, or oil of eucalyptus, when used as labeled, are effective defenses against mosquitoes.
- Check your window screens for holes.
- Do not allow water to collect and stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, or other containers. These are prime breeding grounds for mosquitoes.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools; drain water from pool covers.
- Stock garden ponds with goldfish or other mosquito-eating fish. These eat mosquito eggs and larvae.
- Empty and wash birdbaths and wading pools weekly.

The Los Angeles County Public Health Department has established a toll-free information line that will provide callers with updated information on West Nile Virus within the county. Call 800-975-4448.

If a recently dead bird (less than 24 hours) is found, the public is encouraged to report this by calling 877-747-2243.

If residents see a “green pool” or stagnant swimming pool at a home, please report this to Public Health’s Environmental Health Bureau at 626-430-5200.

## **Where to call with questions about mosquitoes:**

Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District: (562) 944-9656

Los Angeles County West Vector Control District: (310) 915-7370

San Gabriel Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District: (626) 814-9466

Antelope Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District: (661) 942-2917

Compton Creek Mosquito Abatement District: (310) 639-7375

Pasadena City Health Department: (626) 744-6004

City of Long Beach Vector Control Program: (562) 570-4132

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

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